Gaza receives bodies of 15 prisoners under ceasefire exchange deal

• Israeli military kills two for approaching 'prohibited' area • Tel Aviv extends arrest of army's former top legal officer

KHAN YUNIS/JERUSALEM: Gaza's Nasser Hospital in the southern city of Khan Yunis on Wednesday said it had received the bodies of 15 Palestinian prisoners under the US-brokered ceasefire exchange deal.

"The tenth batch of the bodies of Palestinian martyrs has arrived at Nasser Medical Complex in the Gaza Strip, numbering 15 martyrs," the hospital said in a statement, noting that 285 bodies were received under the agreement in total.

They were returned in exchange for the latest hostage body handed back from Gaza on Tuesday, that of Israeli-American soldier Itay Chen. Under the terms of the US-brokered agreement in effect since October 10, Israel returns 15 bodies of Palestinians for every body it receives of an Israeli hostage who had been held in Gaza.

At the start of the truce, Hamas held 48 prisoners in Gaza — 20 alive and 28 deceased. The militants have since released all the surviving captives, as well as 21 of the deceased's remains. The Palestinian group says the process is slow because many are buried beneath Gaza's rubble.

The group has repeatedly called on mediators and the Red Cross to provide it with the necessary equipment and personnel to recover the bodies.

PALESTINIANS receive food from a charity kitchen in Khan Yunis.—Reuters

Two killed by Israeli army

The Israeli military said it had killed two Palestinians who had approached an area it occupied in a "threatening" way. Gazan health authorities said that Israeli fire had killed a Palestinian collecting firewood.

Israel has continued to intermittently strike the Gaza Strip, although the degree of violence has diminished since the ceasefire allowing hundreds of thousands of Palestinians to return to the ruins of their homes and more aid to enter. Israel has withdrawn troops from positions in cities to behind a yellow demarcation line.

The ceasefire was mediated by the United States, and both sides have appealed to Washington to halt violations.

Arrest of legal officer extended

The detention of the Israeli military's former chief legal officer, who was arrested on Sunday, has been extended until Friday, a police source said on Wednesday.

Advocate General Major-General Yifat Tomer-Yerushalmi resigned last week over a criminal inquiry into the leaking of a video that appeared to show soldiers abusing a Palestinian detainee arrested during the Gaza conflict.

Tomer-Yerushalmi, who said she was quitting because she had approved the video's leak in August 2024, was briefly reported missing on Sunday, but was later found and taken into custody.

Police did not immediately reply to a request for comment on the source's remarks to Reuters. The video surfaced during an abuse investigation that led to the Israeli military prosecutor filing indictments against five reservists, alleging severe abuse and injury of a Palestinian prisoner in an Israeli prison, included cracked ribs, a punctured lung and a torn rectum.

The inquiry drew condemnation from right-wing politicians, and protesters stormed two military compounds after investigators sought troops for questioning in the case.

A week after the break-in at the bases, a security camera video showing the moments of the alleged abuse was leaked to Israel's N12 News.

It showed soldiers taking a prisoner aside and crowding around while holding a dog and blocking visibility of their actions with their riot gear.

Tomer-Yerushalmi said her actions were an attempt to fend off propaganda against the military's legal department entrusted with upholding the rule of law. Rights groups have reported grave abuses of Palestinians in Israeli detention during the conflict.—Agencies

Spain's king recounts scandals in wistful memoir

PARIS: Mixing historic anecdotes and regret over his own scandals, Spain's exiled king Juan Carlos I seeks to reconcile himself with his family and nation in newly published memoirs that offer dramatic reminiscences from one of the last surviving players of 20th-century history.

From holding Franco's hand on the dictator's deathbed to helping defuse a coup, the 87-year-old reviews well-known moments from Spain's history in his 500-page book, published in French on Wednesday and in Spanish next month.

Seeking to mend relations with his estranged son, Spain's King Felipe VI, Juan Carlos also confronts his individual pain and isolation — from seeing his brother die in a childhood shooting accident to the romantic and financial "mistakes" that drove him back into exile in his eighties.

"There is not one day when I'm not overcome by nostalgia," he declares from self-imposed exile in Abu Dhabi, in the book Reconciliation, co-written with the French author Laurence Debray.

"It's like I've got Spain under my skin." — Memories of Franco — Appointed by Franco to succeed him, Juan Carlos was widely credited with helping steer Spain to democracy after the fascist dictator died in 1975.

He recalls sitting beside Franco — who acted as an almost "paternal" figure towards him — as the ailing dictator lay dying in his hospital bed.

"He took my hand and said, as if it was his last breath: 'Your highness, I ask you just one thing: keep the country united,'" Juan Carlos recalls.

"So I had a free hand to launch reforms, as long as Spain's unity was not endangered." He also recalls putting on his general's jacket to appear on television, ordering rebellious soldiers back to their barracks after they staged a coup in parliament in February 1981.

Debray judged Juan Carlos's tale "a unique European life story". "He is one of the only surviving (world) leaders from the Second World War" generation, she said.

Despite being seen "as quite a cheerful man" by some, "he is a man who has been very alone — very much torn between his family and Franco since his earliest childhood."

In 2014 Juan Carlos broke his hip on a hunting trip to Botswana with his then-mistress, Corinna Larsen — a visit branded as an unforgivable extravagance at the height of Spain's economic crisis.—AFP

A UNIT of the Brazilian army specialising in chemical decontamination deploys in Belem ahead of the United Nations Climate Change Conference.—Reuters

'Rising temperatures imperil northern hemisphere forests'

GENEVA: Record wildfires and rising temperatures are threatening decades of forest growth in the northern hemisphere, potentially turning vital carbon sinks into carbon emitters, a new UN report said on Wednesday.

The report by the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), released ahead of the COP30 climate conference in Brazil, found that forests in Europe, North America, the Caucasus, and Central Asia are slowing in their ability to absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

If current trends continue, these forests could reach a tipping point where they begin releasing more carbon than they absorb, it warned.

This would undermine efforts to meet the Paris Agreement target of lowering emissions to keep global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, as these forests currently offset a major portion of human-produced CO2 emissions from fossil fuels and deforestation. Forests in the northern hemisphere hold about half of the world's carbon storage.

"The message is clear: What we have achieved over the last three decades is now at serious risk from the climate emergency," UNECE Executive Secretary Tatiana Molcean said in a statement.

The report highlights the vulnerability of the Arctic boreal forests, which contain nearly half of the world's primary, old-growth woodland and store large amounts of carbon. These forests face growing threats from rising temperatures and wildfires.

The northern hemisphere accounts for over 42pc of the world's forests and nearly half of its primary woodland, but is increasingly exposed to fire, pests, and drought, according to the report. Such factors have led to Europe's forests absorbing nearly one-third less CO2 annually in 2020-22 compared to 2010-14, a study led by the European Union's Joint Research Centre found.

"We cannot afford to lose the planet's most powerful natural defense," Molcean said. "The rising tide of wildfires and drought is pushing our forests past a critical tipping point." At COP30, Brazil is set to launch the Tropical Forests Forever Fund to provide funding to countries that commit to preserving their forests. —Reuters

Attack on funeral in Sudan claims 40 lives

PORT SUDAN: An attack on a funeral in the key city of El-Obeid in Sudan's central Kordofan region killed 40 people, the UN said on Wednesday, as paramilitaries looked poised to launch an offensive.

The United Nations' humanitarian office did not specify when the attack took place or who was behind it, but said that the situation in the Kordofan region was continuing to worsen.

The war in Sudan, which has killed tens of thousands of people and displaced millions more, has spread to new areas in recent days, sparking fears of an even greater humanitarian catastrophe.

The paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), at war with the military since 2023, was preparing to launch an assault in Kordofan after capturing El-Fasher, the last army stronghold in the vast western Darfur region.

"Local sources report that at least 40 civilians were killed and dozens injured yesterday in an attack on a funeral gathering in El Obeid, the capital of North Kordofan State," the UN's OCHA agency said.

"Once again, OCHA calls for an immediate cessation of hostilities and for all parties to protect civilians and respect international humanitarian law." People forced to flee El-Fasher have described horrific abuse, including rape, at the hands of the RSF.

"The rapes were gang rapes. Mass rape in public, rape in front of everyone, and no one could stop it," mother of four Amira said from a makeshift shelter in Tawila, some 70 kilometres (43 miles) west of El-Fasher.

Doctors Without Borders (MSF) said more than 300 survivors of sexual violence had sought care from its teams in Tawila after a previous RSF assault on the nearby Zamzam camp, which displaced more than 380,000 people last spring.

"You'd be asleep and they'd come and rape you," said Amira, using a pseudonym while speaking during a webinar organised by campaign group Avaaz.

"I saw with my own eyes people who couldn't afford to pay, and the fighters took their daughters instead. They said, 'Since you can't pay, we'll take the girls.' If you had daughters at a young age, they would take them immediately." Both sides in the war have been accused of committing atrocities.

US truce proposal

The fall of El-Fasher gave paramilitaries control over all five state capitals in Darfur, raising fears that Sudan would effectively be partitioned along an east-west axis.

The RSF now dominates Darfur and parts of the south, while the army holds the north, east, and central regions along the Nile and Red Sea.

The UAE is accused by the UN of supplying arms to the RSF — allegations it has repeatedly denied.

Meanwhile, the Sudanese army has received support from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Iran, according to observers.

Sudan's army-backed defence minister on Tuesday said the military would press on with its fight against the RSF after the security and defence council met to discuss a US proposal for a ceasefire.

"We thank the Trump administration for its efforts and proposals to achieve peace," Hassan Kabroun said in a speech broadcast on state television, while adding that "preparations for the Sudanese people's battle are ongoing".

"Our preparations for war are a legitimate national right," he said.

No details of the US truce proposal have been made public.

White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt told reporters on Tuesday that Washington wanted "to see this conflict come to a peaceful end, just as we have with so many others, but the reality is it's a very complicated situation on the ground right now".

She said the United States was "actively engaged" in seeking a peace deal alongside Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE.

'Nightmare of violence'

The army-aligned authorities had rejected an earlier truce proposal from the four countries — referred to as the Quad — under which both the army and the RSF would be excluded from a transitional political process.—AFP

Uganda kills 'herbalist' who attacked military

KAMPALA: Ugandan authorities said late Tuesday that security forces had killed a "traditional herbalist" who reportedly led a coordinated attack on police and military bases over the weekend.

The attack began on Saturday and targeted three districts in Uganda's remote western regions along the border with the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the army said.

Insurgents using submachine guns and machetes attacked police and military posts in Bundibugyo, Kasese, and Fort Portal districts, killing at least one civilian and one soldier. An army official in Bundibugyo told it was a group seeking to "acquire weapons to start a tribal militia," but that it had been pushed back by security forces.

The attack was led by a man named Christian Asuman Muganzi, a "traditional herbalist", said Albert Kaliruga, deputy head of security for the region.

He was cornered at his hideout in Kakuka, Bundibugyo, on Tuesday and killed along with "over 20" of his fighters, with 15 others arrested.—AFP

Bihar polls a litmus test for Modi's minority govt

Continued from Page 1

in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Kerala who have joined hands with the Congress to widen the allegation into a movement.

The most threatened by any arbitrary act to tweak the voter's list is West Bengal where the Mamata Bannerjee government enjoys more than a handy support of Muslims. Curiously, the BJP-ruled states of Assam and Tripura have been left out of the coming round of revision of the voter's list. Opposition has cried foul over the exclusion.

So, what is going to happen in Bihar? Its caste arithmetic is as crucial as it is murky. The state abuts Nepal with which it shares an open border. Recent events in the landlocked country are being watched in Bihar. Gen Z voters are at the heart of this election campaign in Bihar: the state has India's largest proportion of youth population.

"Nearly 58 per cent of Bihar's population is under 25 years of age and hence belong to the Generation Z cohort," says *The Wire*. "In terms of voters, one in every four voters is a Gen Z. Of them, 1.47 million are first-time voters."

10 injured as man rams car into pedestrians

BORDEAUX: A 35-year-old man on Wednesday rammed his car into pedestrians and cyclists on the French Atlantic island of Oleron, wounding 10 people, including four seriously, a prosecutor said.

The Oleron resident "deliberately hit several pedestrians and cyclists" along a main road on the scenic island off the western city of La Rochelle, prosecutor Arnaud Laraize said. When he was arrested, he cried in Arabic, the magistrate said, an expression that is often used by extremists.

Police have arrested the man and are investigating him for alleged "attempted murder", but the man's motive was not immediately clear, Laraize added.

A source following the case earlier said the man had "deliberately hit" the victims, across several kilometres.

The prosecutor said the ramming occurred on a road joining the towns of Dolus d'Oleron and Saint-Pierre d'Oleron. The mayor of Dolus d'Oleron confirmed the suspect was a resident.—AFP

FRENCH gendarmes inspect the burnt car used by a driver who rammed into pedestrians and cyclists on the touristic French island of Ile d'Oleron.—Reuters

EU strikes last-ditch deal on climate targets as COP30 looms

BRUSSELS: The European Union struck a deal on Wednesday on the 27-nation bloc's next big emissions-cutting targets in time for next week's UN COP30 climate summit at the cost of deep concessions to reluctant capitals.

After months of haggling and marathon overnight talks, the bloc averted the worst-case scenario of turning up empty-handed to the gathering in Brazil, where it hopes to assert its leadership in the fight against global warming.

EU countries agreed to target a 90-percent cut in greenhouse gas emissions by 2040 compared to 1990 levels — a key milestone towards its goal of becoming carbon neutral by mid-century.

They also agreed on a related 2035 target to bring to the UN summit — which EU chief Ursula von der Leyen trumpeted as "good news" as she arrived in the northern Brazilian city of Belem for a leaders' summit ahead of the talks that start Monday.

But international carbon credits will be allowed to count towards five percent of the 2040 goal, with the possibility for countries to claim a further five percent under future revisions — one of a string of concessions slammed by environmentalists.

Greenpeace said the final compromise "falls significantly short" of what is needed from the bloc of 450 million inhabitants — and rested on what it said amounts to "offshore carbon laundering".

"It's like promising to run a marathon by only training 10 kilometres, taking the bus for the last kilometre of that, and reserving the right to just stay home if it rains," said Greenpeace campaigner Thomas Gelin.

Behind only China, the United States, and India in terms of emissions, the EU has been the most committed of the major polluters to climate action and has already cut emissions by 37 percent compared to 1990 levels.

But after blazing a trail, the EU's political landscape has shifted right, and climate concerns have taken a backseat to defence and competitiveness — with concerns in some capitals that greening Europe's economy is harming growth.

"Setting a climate target is not just picking a number, it is a political decision with far-reaching consequences for the continent," said Danish climate minister Lars Aagaard.

The EU needed support from a weighted majority of countries for the 2040 climate target set out by the European Commission, which implies sweeping changes to industry and daily life. —Agencies

Zohran Mamdani wins over NYC

Continued from Page 1

mother is famed Indian filmmaker Mira Nair — a personal history that mirrors the multicultural, multiracial, and multi-religious character of the metropolis.

In a metropolis where Muslims were once attacked on trains and buses, he successfully persuaded voters to elect the city's first Muslim mayor.

Mr Mamdani's spirited campaign, driven by a motivational agenda, captivated supporters who found it inspiring and unsettled opponents who saw it as threatening. But his strategy of mobilizing voters proved decisive, with more than two million people casting ballots—setting a new record for New York City.

Former US first lady and 2016 presidential candidate Hillary Clinton noted: "More people voted in New York City's election this year than they have in 50 years."

Her husband and former president Bill Clinton congratulated him, saying, "I'm wishing you success as you work to transform the passion of your campaign into building a better, fairer, more affordable New York."

Former president Barack Obama, who had initially been reluctant to endorse Mr Mamdani, also congratulated Democrats nationwide: "When we come together around strong, forward-looking leaders who care about the issues that matter, we can win."

The warmest message came from Mamdani's fellow Democratic socialist, Senator Bernie Sanders. "Starting at 1pc in the polls, Zohran Mamdani pulled off one of the great political upsets in modern American history," Sanders said. "Yes, we can create a government that represents working people and not the 1[c. I look forward to working with Zohran as he builds a city that works for all." His victory capped a night of sweeping wins for Democrats in key US races, reflecting a renewed wave of progressive momentum and a strong anti-Trump vote.

Democrats sweep

In Virginia, Democrat Abigail Spanberger defeated Republican Winsome Earle-Sears to become the state's next governor. She will succeed Republican Glenn Youngkin, who was ineligible to run for re-election due to term-limit rules.

In New Jersey, Democrat Mikie Sherrill secured the governorship against Republican Jack Ciattarelli, marking another win for the party in historically competitive states.

In California, voters approved Proposition 50 — a measure that could allow Democrats to flip up to five additional US House seats in the state, bolstering their national position ahead of the 2026 midterm elections. Analysts say these results reflect voter concern over economic and social issues and may influence the broader political landscape during President Trump's second term.

CBS News conducted a poll on Wednesday asking voters: Was Trump a factor in your vote?

In California, 59pc of voters answered yes. That figure was 54pc in Virginia, 43pc in New Jersey, and 40pc in the New York mayoral race.

While the Trump factor dominated coverage across major outlets—from *CNN* and *BBC* to *The Washington Post* and *Financial Times* — it does not overshadow Mr Mamdani's remarkable effort in New York City.